

Rush, (W.)

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATES

OF THE

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE,

BY

WILLIAM RUSH, M. D.,

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Department of Pennsylvania College.

box 6



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PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 7th, 1840.

DEAR SIR.

At a meeting of the graduates of Pennsylvania Med. College, held in the College edifice, Doctor J. Pearce in the chair, the undersigned were appointed a committee on behalf of the graduates to request a copy of your valedictory address for publication. In performing this pleasing duty, the committee would respectfully request that the wish of their fellow-graduates be complied with and beg leave to add on their own part the sincere desire they feel to witness the publication of your highly eloquent and appropriate address—should it meet your views we sincerely hope you will transmit a copy for publication.

We are, dear sir, your sincere friends and pupils,

T. H. ROE, M. D.,

A. B. LEE, M. D.,

J. LAUCK, M. D.,

E. S. BAER, M. D.,

A. H. OKIE, M. D.,

Committee.

WM. RUSH, Esq., M. D.

PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 10th, 1840.

GENTLEMEN,

I have received your note requesting me to furnish you with a copy of an address for publication, which I delivered to the Graduates of the Medical Department of Pennsylvania College on the occasion of the commencement.

As it was not written with an intention to publish it—I beg you will believe that my objection to do so, has alone been removed by the cordial and flattering terms in which your wishes upon this subject have been conveyed to me. A copy of the address is therefore at your disposal.

With great respect, I am truly yours,

WILLIAM RUSH.

TO DRs. T. H. ROE, Ohio,

A. B. LEE, Maryland,

J. LAUCK, D. Columbia,

E. S. BAER, Pennsylvania,

A. H. OKIE, Philadelphia,

Committee.

GENTLEMEN GRADUATES OF THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT
OF PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE!

In presenting myself before you to-day, by request of my friends and colleagues, I design to offer you as the subject of an address, **A FEW THOUGHTS UPON THE LIFE OF A PHYSICIAN.** The general tenor of the views which I shall submit, is consistent with the excursive range of remark, which custom has allowed on occasions like the present; and if, in performing the duty I have undertaken, I shall succeed by any words of encouragement, in furthering your zeal for the profession you have chosen, my object will be sufficiently and pleurably attained.

The profession for which you are destined, has different passes, and resting-places, discoverable by future research and instruction. My province. at present, is, briefly and generally, to tell you the good travellers approach to them—his valuable acquisitions among them, and their ultimate honor to himself, and benefit to others.

I will divide the Life of a Physician into three common æras—his early labors—his success—and his latter days. If I shall fail to portray him in these, as attractively as I desire, the fault will be in my mode of copying, not in the excellence of the models I may use.

It may be asserted, that the vocations of men are generally induced by early and corresponding inclination for them; and though the exception is proved in the accidents which change their pursuits, and influence their destinies, biography frequently classes, as cause and effect, an early turn or bent of mind, and the subsequent strength of its grasp. Eminence, in every department of science, has traced its first risings to such early mental predilections, and, it is fortunate for the young man, destined for the Medical Profession, if he brings to its elementary studies, 'powers' of investigation, 'previously exercised upon *things*, without new and *formidable names*—Words and Terms, are to him, in his new enterprise, as different strata of Earth to the Miner. He learns them only to know their want of use, or their frequent hindrance to his progress. But knowledge gained through the avenues of his senses—facts collected from Nature's undoubted proofs, these are the student's Gold region, these, the riches which reward his toil. I need not loiter here upon the path leading to his Medical Degree, in attributing to him a sixth sense, if I may so speak, in the power of prompt investigation through his other five: I allot to him the best means of simplifying knowledge, and rendering its acquisition practical.

There is a resemblance in the minds of those eminent in the Medical Profession, to those distinguished in Natural Science, and the Mechanic Arts—but, the votaries of the two latter, have in their pursuit, greater facilities to their advancement, they are less obstructed by the clogs of unmeaning terminology, or the encumbrances of abstract theories. It is through experiment by the hand, the eye, by all the senses, through tests, generally the result of patient purpose; and sometimes, as if to crown with fortune such wise methods of investigation,—of very accident—that science has been developed in her simplicity,

and her usefulness. These tests have been to scientific improvement, the giant strides with which she has marched. The Student of Medicine, aware of this, by practical observation, triumphs over his relative disadvantages, and adheres to it as the best assurance of advancing truth. His authority for it, is the reason of the rule, his examples of its achievements, whether in Medicine or Philosophy, are in the illustrious names of an Hippocrates or a Galen, a Bacon or a Newton.

Let these general considerations be a sufficient notice of the Student's previously to his commencing the practice of his Profession. I have said nothing of his diligence, his patience in official servitude, his acquirements in general knowledge, in principles and practice of morality, in all things. In this, his last and best of habits—by his professional contemplation of Nature, he will most frequently see the manifestation of its Great Author: the light and life of all morality, who offers to the Physician all which his dilligence may learn; yet who makes conscious of those limits, beyond which his researches may not scan: who teaches him practical knowledge, and who teaches him to desist from impracticable speculation. If Galen, in dissecting the human body, was first taught to acknowledge the Power that wonderfully fashioned it, should not the Student of Medicine, view in the manifold revelations of his profession, the best lessons of holy difference, and practical virtue!

I thus notice in the "Life of a Physician," his term of study, preparatory to the practice of his Art. To the indolent, and the contented ignorant, such occupations are toils weary and repulsive, but it is a favour incident to the work of mental improvement, that the progressive gain of knowledge, is as pleasant to the Studious, as the acquisition of wealth is to the Sordid,—and in the truth of the maxim that the most "honorable enjoyments are the most exquisite"—the diligent man in the

business of amassing mental treasures, has a reward,—unbargained for, but direct.

I come to the period when the Physician, having gained, in his Diploma, his first allowance of professional authority, commences that acquaintance with his patients, for which previous study has given him the best letter of introduction.—Yet I wish not here to attempt to be didactic in the means of his advancement.—There is one great mean for his success, on which he may surely rely; most others I believe defy in their factitiousness and chance, all subjection to general rules. In the mental and moral qualifications, which in this sketch I attribute to the Physician, I may best predict his usefulness and Fame. Slow may be its growth, and no medical gardener may administer to its early luxuriance, by artificial adornments, fastidious trimmings, or other Hot House influences. Planted in the firm foundation of nature which has been his reliance, she will requite him with her care—and, in good time make him as the gradual but enduring Oak; to overshadow the precocious groundlings that have early revelled in the sunshine of trusted,—but illusive patronage.

I have called the ripeness of the Physician's fame, of slow growth; and the histories of the good and the great, in the Medical Profession, attest this;—yet, whilst I admit this Truth, I cannot concede the necessity, or justice, of that influence which so often interposes between a Physician's qualifications, and his success. I name among his early discouragements—the prevalent opinion that a Physician must be of a certain age, not in attainments, or power to use them, but in name—and number of years before he shall be entitled to confidence, employment, or reward. He may have passed his medical youth and manhood in Hospitals, and among their myriads of Patients;—with heroic zeal he may have waked amidst the Modern Pestilence of Asia, and of Europe,

learning, through perilous experience, more than a life might teach;—still I will carry the familiar conjecture so far as almost to believe, he will return to his native land and ask for confidence in vain,—unless an Indian clime has furrowed his cheek,—or, the frosts of Russia have touched the hairs of his Head. Why is not this distrust of youth exhibited in other vocations? We ask not the age of those, to whom is entrusted the care of our immortal souls; nor of those whose duty it is to protect our rights—and even to save us from Ignominious Death!—their youth is a warrant for their zeal and activity.

But, let us look over the wide earth,—to those, whose names stand like enduring columns on its surface. The Achievements of the Conquerors of the world—whether of “Macedonia’s madman,”—or “the Swede”—or of him who as if on the wings of his warlike eagles, last soared with his myriads over the Alps;—of those too, who have won a world by the subduing, but bloodless, scepter of Poetic genius; of a Chatterton, or a Pope; a Burns, or a Byron; all glitter in history, at periods of relative boyhood—and the early season which fame has selected for its brightest burnish to their names, seems to stamp their romantic interest, and their impressive value. Different is the fate of the Physician. He woos, in public favour a coy and cold mistress, who by a peculiar denial of complaisance, delights not in the freshness of the cheek, nor in the attractiveness of youthful symmetry. Pitt may be Prime Minister of England, at threeandtwenty!—and the greater his renown in the fact; but the young Physician, who shall ask, not for Pre-Eminence, but for confidence in his profession!—shall have inconsistent homilies of “Inexperience” for his answer, and “Hope deferred” for his pains. Yet with him, it maketh not always the “heart sick”—as certainly as he is destined to eminence—so surely he shrinks not at this discouragement, and I shall presently glance at the full

atonement he afterwards receives, when a capricious world, casting by its influential estimate, the sear of age, on the usefulness of others,—triumphantly compensates the Physician, by conceding to his latest services, their greatest practical value.

But the young Physician has other trials to endure. The want of self-confidence arising partly from the modesty of true merit—but more from encountered distrust in others—flattering gleams—and untoward disappointment in professional hopes; the oft mortified sport of the petulant patient, or the inconsiderate employer. These are the thorns that spring up as if for the special obstruction of his path; and all these, not because he is incompetent, but because he is—young. Well may he exclaim,—

Hail! morn of winning and ingenuous youth

To All—save Doctors, the best test of Truth.

I am driven by such thoughts almost to compassionate the subject of my eulogy.

But, if the joys of life are fleeting, its troubles have their end.—I could not make the consideration of Medical character the subject of this address, if I did not enable the Physician to walk through the “dark valley” of his profession without fear, and without ill. It is through anxious trials that good minds are purified and strengthened, and I believe that the Physician would not be so valued in maturity, nor so honored in age; but for those early inflictions, which to the virtuous are ultimate usefulness and glory.

I thus allude to some of the annoyances in the “life of a Physician.” They are as fogs in his path, soon to roll away and leave him a clear horizon of success. All men toil for reward, yet few realize, and still fewer enjoy it, when attained. Alexanders have wept—when there were

no more worlds to conquer; the Seeker of Riches has sighed for gold,—and found it dross. And Castlereagh, standing on the dazzling eminence of the British Statesman's Paradise, found its streams waters of bitterness; and its fruit,—ashes.

Different is the end of the Physician's hopes;—to Him, there is happiness, as well as power in knowledge, and by his habit of extensive mental acquisition, his means of pleasure are as diffusive, as they are true.

I will not particularize the enjoyments of his professional success, even in the degree in which I have glanced at his previous struggles for it; nor dilate upon those ties, exquisite, though little commemorated, which exists between the Physician and his patients. Though called by these often to share the sorrows that cluster around disease and death, yet, taught by his profession to resist the destroyer to the last, He is the reliance, when all around are faint; His voice is fearless, and encouraging, even at the yawning grave.

The Physician is welcomed and honored beyond the private walks of his vocation, and it is well for Philanthropy, that virtuous men delight in the rewards of worldly approbation. Public opinion may sometimes play "fantastic tricks" of temporary favour, with those who juggle with it, but it is wise and discerning in its lasting gifts. Such temporary favour may be compared to that shewn by Vidocq, the Agent of Parisian Police; it marks the dealer in "counterfeit coin," it protects and patronizes him, and virtuous men wonder at, and condemn his immunity; but, the minion at last deceives the employer, Justice asserts her own, and the victim is crushed by his trusted patron.

The worldly favor given to the Physician is frequent and practical; and let not the illustration be deemed too familiar, that numbers one of its items in the advantage of his very title; the name of "Doctor," is a passport to him. Washington Irving has said, that wherever the benighted traveller hears the sound of music, he may approach in the security of meeting with courtesy and kindness. So the Physician; when he hears himself addressed by the social appellation of "Doctor," marks in its very sound the pledge of welcome and good will. If this be but a fancied advantage, the traveller at least has found the appellations a fact, for his practical benefit. It has often, through remote and savage countries, been his expedient—and fortunate pretence; and its assumption is a concession of respect to the real healer of diseases.

If the Conqueror has his proud monument in the battle-field, and the Poet his memorials in the creations of bright and seducing fiction, there are also Temples of Science, reared over the Earth, in which the names of the wise and glorious Benefactors of humanity, of whatever country, are interchangeably recorded. These are the abiding places of the fame of the illustrious Physician, repositories more precious to practical Philanthropy—than the trophy of the Warrior, or the witching dreams of the Poet.

This may seem like the imaginings of freely avowed enthusiasm, for a chosen subject; but let a familiar anecdote attest its substantial truth: the [great Medical Teacher of Holland, is said to have received from a Chinese Mandarin a letter whose only superscription was "To the Illustrious Boerhaave, Physician in Europe." What has happened through mental and moral achievement, shall be permitted to mental and moral excellence to happen again. If such an honor as Boerhaave's, is not, in the relative infancy of his country, yet coupled with the

name of the American Physician, let his intellectual aim still be—onward, an identical or equal meed of glory awaits him.

I have thus glanced over the period in the Life of a Physician, which dates from the days of his known success. I have shewn in each brief sketch the bright side of the picture, for I believe such delineations coincident with models of cheering reality. I have contemplated my subject, as I would look upon my friend, heeding not the exceptionous objections to him, whose strong and general virtue I know to be sufficient. In the same spirit I will exhibit the Physician when his days are hastening to mortality's allotted close.

I have said that the usefulness of the Practitioner of Medicine passes not away in his old age. Time, then, proves to him an equitable paymaster. He is to his latest hour requited for confidence withheld in youth, and, if I may so speak, with interest too, for its early deprivation,—Age dims not his vision of disease, nor of the means of its cure; and when his tottering limbs bear him to the door of his patient—it is a sign true as triumphant to the venerable Physician, that a life of exceeding value is in jeopardy within. The ripeness of his years, is the fulness of his honor; and in that unalloyed homage, received by illustrious men in their latter days, he enjoys what has been happily called “the best foretaste of Immortality.” As surely as in his path of life, there are many “ways of pleasantness,” so in its end, there is peace. Many, many, mourn his loss, and his Memory is a monument reared by death, to his vanquished but intrepid enemy.

I thus, Gentlemen, conclude these partial thoughts on the Life of a Physician. If, however, common and familiar, they shall have produced but a momentary addition of enthusiasm for that Profession

the gates of whose temple are this day thrown open to receive and cordially welcome you, I shall not deem these thoughts uttered in vain.

Permit me, Gentlemen, in the name of my Colleagues, to bid you all an affectionate farewell, and may the sunset of your days be as cloudless and serene—as the present morning of your hopes is bright and auspicious.